

CDF NEWS RELEASE

California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection



CONTACT:

Karen Terrill
Public Information Officer
916.653.5123

RELEASE
DATE:

July 24, 2001

Aircraft Interfering with Fire Fighting

Sacramento- On May 30, 2001 a television news helicopter flew into the airspace over the Clayton Fire near Santa Rosa. The aircraft interfered with the work of fire fighting aircraft for more than 30 minutes until it was escorted out of the area. In mid-June of this year, on a fire near Petaluma, air tanker drops had to be suspended due to a private plane entering the airspace over a wildland fire without permission. These are just two recent incidents of airspace incursions that have interfered with aircraft fighting a wildfire. In fact, virtually every airbase in the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF) has reported problems this year with unauthorized aircraft intruding into the airspace over a wildfire.

The purpose of this news release is twofold:

- 1) To reach out to our fellow pilots in the news media and remind them to avoid the airspace over wildfires unless granted permission to enter.
- 2) To ask that this information be shared with your viewers, listeners and readers so that private pilots will also be aware of how dangerous it is to fly into the airspace over a wildfire.

Closing the Airspace:

Under F.A.R. 91.137 - The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) will close the airspace over an incident at the request of CDF. The FAA will then release a Notice to Airman (NOTAM) that advises pilots they must have CDF permission to enter the closed airspace. CDF will grant such permission to the news media whenever possible.

-MORE-



Procedure for media pilots to enter the airspace over an emergency:

- Whether the airspace has been closed or not, a pilot who wants to fly over a wildfire should contact the CDF air attack officer at least 5 miles out. Using frequency 122.925, provide a description of the aircraft, the media affiliation, the time of entry and departure.
- After receiving permission to enter, follow instructions completely. Do not descend below the assigned altitude (usually at least 3,000 ft. Above Ground Level) unless cleared by an air attack officer to do so.
- CDF air attack officers will work with photographers whenever possible to help get the visuals needed.
- Notify the air attack officer when leaving the area.

Generally, CDF has a good working relationship with media on the ground and in the air. Most media pilots stay out of the way and are not a problem. However, airspace incursions are becoming increasingly common. They are dangerous for everyone involved. We ask that all media outlets remind their own pilots and the pilots among their audiences not to interfere with the helicopters and air tankers that are fighting fire. Please avoid the airspace over a wildland fire unless granted permission to be there.

#